CBU
Complacency

MSgt Steven McKinnon, Cannon AFB, N.M.

There I was watching a CBU-87 rolling to a stop on the floor and I am asking myself how did this happen? How did a simple download of an inert CBU-87, while in the load barn, end up so badly? My intentions were to finish the downloading process and go to lunch. After lunch, we were to resume the initial certification of the crew, but Mr. Murphy had to step in and foul things up.

What happened? As a Squadron Lead Crew (SLC) #2 person, I was in charge of evaluating an initial certification of the #2 and #3 person of one of our unit's weapons load crews. Their load crew chief was a certified, experienced senior airman. The first training upload of the day went smoothly, and the munition was downloaded without incident. The second upload went well also. The crew started the download process on the second load when the mishap took place. The driver of the MJ-1 lift truck positioned the table under the CBU-87 while the #1 person searched in his checklist pouch for the 3/8 drive ratchet. This is where things went wrong and my desire to assist overshadowed my responsibility as an evaluator. Forgetting the rule of the right tool for the right job, I seized the opportunity to help with the download operation; I removed the MAU-12 safety pin and inserted it into the bomb rack release mechanism to open the MAU-12 hooks.

The bomb immediately fell onto the lift truck table and bounced off striking the left front fender on its way to the hangar floor. On the way down, the CBU-87 twisted and broke the fin release wire that was still wrapped around the bomb rack sway brace arm. The CBU then rolled two and a half times before coming to a stop.

The question started forming in the back of my head. Why as an evaluator, did I take an active part in the download process? I am supposed to keep things like this from happening! I am the person responsible for the entire operation. My SLC team member and I are tasked to teach load crews the proper and safe way to handle munitions. So why did I just do everything wrong?

It was bad enough that I took an active role in the download operation, but then in doing so, I disregarded established procedure. I did not ensure the lift truck table rollers were in solid contact with the bomb prior to releasing it. I did not ensure the bomb's center of gravity was centered on the lift truck table before I pulled out the MAU-12 safety pin. I did not use the proper tool to operate the bomb rack release mechanism. And I did not effectively communicate my actions to the crew chief who could have been reaching for the tie-down strap located on the lift truck table right where the bomb fell. I totally disregarded Technical Order procedures.

Fortunately, no one was injured. The CBU-87 weighs close to 950 pounds, and the possibility of someone getting hurt was very real. First of all, the CBU could have crushed the crew chief's hand while he retrieved the tie-down strap from the lift truck table. Second, the bomb could have fallen on the crew chief or me after it bounced off the lift truck table. What would the ramifications have been if the CBU-87 was "live?" Would any of us still be alive?

So, what have I learned from this experience? In my effort of trying to help, I caused a mishap that I am charged to prevent. If I had just stayed in the evaluator's role and not taken an active, physical role in the down-loading actions, none of this would have happened! I was the #4 person on a 3-person crew and my actions broke the crew's continuity during the loading operation. Weapons personnel are taught from the beginning of their careers to utilize only one crew per job; now, unfortunately, I personally know why!

My message to everyone is … eagerness to get the job done is a great personality trait, but around munitions, it is a trait that needs to be weighed against the potential of that eagerness causing an accident. ▶